



## THE STOLEN BACILLUS

(by H. G. Wells)

"This again", said the Bacteriologist, slipping a glass slide under the microscope, "is, well, a preparation of the Bacillus of cholera- the cholera germ."

The pale-faced man peered down the microscope. He was obviously not used to that kind of thing. "I see very little", he said.

"Turn this knob", said the Bacteriologist, "perhaps the microscope is out of focus for you".

"Ah! Now I see", said the visitor. "Not so very much to see after all. Little streaks and shreds of pink. And yet those little particles, those mere atoms, might multiply and devastate a city! Wonderful!"

He stood up, and releasing the glass slide from the microscope, held it in his hand towards the window. "Hardly visible", he said, observing the preparation. He hesitated. "Are these alive? Are they dangerous now?"

"Those have been stained and killed", said the Bacteriologist. "I wish we could kill and stain every one of them in the universe."

"I suppose", the pale man said "that you don't care to have such things around, in the active state?"

"On the contrary, we are obliged to", said the Bacteriologist. "Here, for instance.." He walked across the room and took up one of several sealed

tubes. "Here is the living thing. This is a cultivation/culture of the actual living disease bacteria". He hesitated. "Bottled cholera."

"It's a deadly thing to have in your possession", he said. This man, who had visited him that afternoon with a note of introduction from an old friend

interested him because of his great curiosity. He had black hair, deep grey eyes and a nervous manner. Compared to the ordinary scientist, he was really impressionable.

He held the tube in his hand thoughtfully. "Yes, here is the pestilence imprisoned. Only break this little tube into a supply of drinking water and say to these little particles, which one cannot smell or taste: Go forth, increase, and multiply, and fill the cisterns," "and death, death full of pain, would be released upon this city and go forth seeking his victims. He would follow the water -mains, creeping along streets, picking out and punishing a house here and a house there where they did not boil their drinking-water, creeping into the wells of the mineral water manufacturers, getting washed into salad, and laying asleep in ice cubes. He would wait ready to be drunk in the public fountains. He would soak into the soil, to reappear in springs and wells in a thousand unexpected places. Once he starts at the water supply, and before we could catch him again, he would have decimated the metropolis."

He stopped abruptly/suddenly. "But he is quite safe here, you know- quite safe."

The pale-faced man nodded. His eye shone. He cleared his throat. "These Anarchists," he said, "are fools, blind fools- to use bombs when this kind of thing is attainable. I think ..."

A knock was heard at the door. The Bacteriologist opened it. "Just a minute, dear", he whispered to his wife.

When he entered the laboratory again, his visitor was looking at his watch. "I had no idea I had wasted an hour of your time," he said. "Twelve minutes to four. I should have left by half past three, but your things were really interesting. I cannot stay a moment longer. I have a meeting at four."

He left the room repeating his thanks, and the Bacteriologist accompanied him to the door, and then returned to his laboratory. He was thinking about his visitor. "A morbid product, anyhow, I am afraid", said the Bacteriologist to himself. "How he delighted over those cultivations of disease germs!" Suddenly, a disturbing thought struck him. He turned to the bench by the

vapour-bath and then to his desk. He quickly felt his pockets and then rushed to the door. "Maybe I have put it down on the hall table", he said.

"Minnie!" he shouted in the hall.

"Yes, dear," she said.

"Did I have anything in my hand when I spoke to you, dear, just now?"

"Nothing, dear, because I remember ..."

"Oh, no!" cried the Bacteriologist and ran to the front door and down the steps of his house to the street.

Minnie, hearing the door slam violently, rushed to the window. Down the street, a thin man was getting into a taxi. The Bacteriologist, in his slippers, was running and gesticulating wildly towards this group. One slipper came off, but he did not wait for it. "He has gone mad!" said Minnie; "it's that horrible science of his". The thin man suddenly looked around and pointed to the Bacteriologist. Then, he said something to the taxi driver and they disappeared around the corner.

Minnie remained hanging out of the window for a minute. Then she drew her head back into the room again. She was astonished. "Of course, he is eccentric", she thought. "But running around London in his socks and without a hat!" Suddenly, she decided to go after him. She quickly put her hat on, took his shoes, went into the hall, took his hat and light overcoat, and called a taxi. "Drive me up the road and round Havelock Crescent, and see if we can find a gentleman running in a velvet coat and no hat."

"Velvet coat, ma'am and no 'at. Very good, ma'am." And the taxi driver drove so quickly as if he had driven to this address every day of his life.

Some minutes later the little group of taxi drivers and local people that meet around the taxi office at Haverstock Hill were startled by the passing of a taxi driven so quickly.

They were silent as it went by. "That's 'Arry 'Icks. Wot's he got?" said a gentleman known as Old Tootles.

"It's old George", said Old Tootles, "and he's drivin' a loonatic."

The group around the taximan's shelter became louder. Together they cried, " Go, go, George! It's a race. You'll catch 'em!"

"She's following him", said Old Tootles. "It's usually the other way around."

"What's she got in her 'and?"

"Looks like a 'igh 'at."

"How funny it is!"

Minnie went by and they clapped their hands. She did not like it, but she felt that she was doing her duty and she kept her eyes on the back of old George, who was driving her husband so far away from her.

The man in the taxi in front was sitting in the corner, with the little glass tube that contained such vast possibilities of destruction gripped in his hand. His mood was a singular mixture of fear and triumph. He was afraid of being caught before he could achieve his purpose, but behind this was a vague fear of the awfulness of his crime. No Anarchist before him had ever come up with an idea like this. He only had to make sure of the water supply and break the little tube into a reservoir. How brilliantly he had planned it, forged the letter of introduction and got into the laboratory, and how brilliantly he had taken his opportunity! The world should hear of him at last. Death, death, death! They had always treated him as a man of no importance. Now he would teach them what it is to isolate a man. What was this familiar street? Great Saint Andrew's Street, of course. He got out of the taxi. The Bacteriologist was scarcely fifty yards behind. That was bad. He could catch him. So, he felt in his pocket for money, and found fifty cents. He gave this money to the taxi driver and shouted, "More, I wish we could get away"

"Right" , said the taxi driver

Then the taxi swayed, and the Anarchist lost his balance, dropped the test tube, and it shattered.

"Well, I suppose I shall be the first to die, phew! Anyhow, I shall be a Martyr. That's something." Suddenly, a thought occurred to him. A little

drop was still in the broken end of the tube, and he drank it to make sure. It was better to make sure. At any rate, he would not fail.

Then he realized that there was no need to escape the Bacteriologist. In Wellington Street he told the taxi driver to stop and got out. He slipped on the step, and he felt dizzy. This cholera poison was rapid stuff.

"Vive l'Anarchie! You are too late, my friend, I have drunk it. The cholera is abroad!"

The Bacteriologist from his taxi, said: "You have drunk it! An Anarchist! I see now". He was about to say something more, and then checked himself. A smile appeared on his face. He opened the door of the taxi as if to get out. Then the Anarchist waved him farewell and walked towards Waterloo Bridge, bumping his infected body against as many people as possible.

At that moment, Minnie arrived, with his hat and shoes. "Very good of you to bring my things," he said.

"You'd better get in", he said. Minnie felt absolutely convinced now that he was mad. "Put on my shoes? Certainly dear", said he, as the taxi began to turn.

Suddenly he laughed and said. "it is really very serious, though."

"You see, that man came to my house to see me, and he is an Anarchist. No-don't faint. And I wanted to astonish him, not knowing he was an Anarchist. I took up a cultivation of that new type of Bacterium I was telling you about, that infestation that caused the blue patches to appear upon several monkeys; and like a fool I said it was Asiatic cholera. And he ran away with it to poison the water of London. And now he has swallowed it. Of course I cannot say what will happen, but you know that it turned that kitten blue. But the problem is all the trouble and expense, because now I will have to prepare more."

"Put on my coat on this hot day! Why?" " Because we might meet Mrs. Jabber". " My dear, Mrs. Jabber is not a draft. But why should I wear a coat on a hot day because of Mrs... Oh. Very well."

### **The Stolen Bacillus, by H.G Wells**

- 1. Read the story carefully and list all the words linked to the field of Health Science**

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- 2. How much do you know about cholera? Complete the following chart**

What's cholera?	
Illnesses	
Symptoms and signs	
Treatment and prevention	
Infection sources	
Interesting facts	

- 3. Think of a different ending for the story. Imagine that the stolen bacillus is the bacillus of cholera. What would happen then?**

**4. (Extra) Find a news article about cholera and complete the following factsheet**

☐ **Headline:**

☐ **What:**

☐ **Where:**

☐ **When:**

☐ **Why/How:**

GLUE THE NEWS  
ARTICLE HERE

SOURCE: \_\_\_\_\_

